

LAHONTAN CUTTHROAT TROUT NATURAL AREA INSTANT STUDY AREA

1. THE STUDY AREA - 12,316 acres

The Lahontan Cutthroat Trout Natural Area ISA is located in western Humboldt County, approximately 78 miles northwest of Winnemucca. The ISA is comprised of 12,316 acres of public lands with 1,256 acres of private inholdings. The entire ISA boundary is based on legal descriptions with the Summit Lake Indian Reservation forming a portion of the western perimeter.

The ISA straddles the north end of the Black Rock Range, a typical mountain range of the Basin and Range Geomorphic Province. It is an outstandingly beautiful area with its running water, large stands of quaking aspen, willow and mahogany trees, lush meadows, colorful rock formations and good populations of wildlife. The northern extremities of the Black Rock Desert lie to the east and west. Elevations range from 6,120 feet to 8,799 feet.

The Natural Area was established in 1973 to ensure the preservation of the Lahontan Cutthroat Trout, a threatened species of fish, in its natural habitat and to maximize available spawning areas. Natural features of the area consists of scattered stands of aspen and mountain mahogany, mountains and creeks.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE

The recommendation for this ISA is to not designate it as wilderness but to release it for uses other than wilderness. The Lahontan Cutthroat Trout Natural Area ISA is recommended for nonwilderness because of the lack of any units equal to or greater than 5000 acres in size, excessive intrusions and private property and an extensive road system. Because of the small size of all the units within the area, wilderness values could not be preserved on any portion of this ISA.

3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

A. Naturalness: The ISA is not primarily natural. It is an outstandingly beautiful area with its running water, large stands of quaking aspen, willow and mahogany trees, lush meadows, colorful rock formations and good populations of wildlife. While some portions of the study area are in a natural condition, there are numerous intrusions, including 22 miles of roads, fences, corrals and several cabins which would be impossible to rehabilitate without altering the objectives of the natural area and obtaining the private parcels of land located within the ISA. The study area is divided into 12 individual units by the roads which run through the area. Each of these subunits contains less than 5,000 acres.

B. Solitude: Because of the limited size, easy access from three directions, the extensive road system throughout the area and the private inholdings, the solitude of the area has been classified as marginal. Although there are many areas where the visitor experiences solitude because of the topography and vegetation, the numerous examples of man's presence in the area severely detracts from the experience.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation: There are good recreation opportunities within the ISA. Activities such as backpacking, hunting, nature study, horseback riding, photography, cross country skiing and winter camping are all feasible. Although the creeks contain Lahontan Cutthroat Trout, it is not legal to fish for them. Due to the small sizes of the creeks, however, the fish are usually quite viewable. The presence of cool flowing water appeals to a number of people who desire a change from the lower hot, arid desert.

D. Special Features: The outstanding special feature of the ISA is the presence of the Lahontan Cutthroat Trout. The fact that these fish use a major stream (Mahogany Creek) as a principal spawning area was the

reason for the creation of the Natural Area. To protect the quality of the water in the streams, 2,410 acres or 20 percent of the study area were fenced to exclude livestock from their headwaters. The trout is listed as "threatened" on the "Federal Register of Threatened and Endangered Species".

An additional aspect of the livestock enclosure is its effect on riparian vegetation. Among the reasons for the enclosure were the protection of the vegetation and prevention of trampling of streambanks. Stabilization of the watershed was a major objective. Since the enclosure was established, there has been increased plant vigor. Reestablishment of the original, native plant community and improvement of wildlife habitat have occurred. This is one of the few places in Nevada where people can see what the environment looks like, without the presence of livestock.

4. MANAGEABILITY

The area is not manageable as wilderness. There would be extreme management problems connected with the 14 roads which divide the area into 12 different sections and parcels of private lands (10% of study area) that are located throughout the ISA.

5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES

No known oil and gas, geothermal, uranium or thorium deposits occur within the ISA. There are no existing or pending oil, gas or geothermal leases. There are no mining claims.

As a result of this information, it was concluded that energy and mineral potential in the ISA is low.

6. SUMMARY OF WSA SPECIFIC COMMENTS

Two public hearings were held during the public review period on the Draft EIS. The first was in Las Vegas, Nevada, on August 3, 1988. Oral statements were presented by 22 people. Six oral statements were presented at the second hearing at Reno, Nevada on August 4, 1988. The ISA was not discussed.

Of the 36 written comments, one supported the all wilderness recommendation and three supported no wilderness. Comments were made on the large amount of private land, access to the Lahontan Cutthroat Trout fishery, elimination of line camps and the cost of policing the area.

In a letter from the Clearinghouse of the State of Nevada, dated September 7, 1988, the Director of the Clearinghouse said, "...the State concurs with the recommendation presented in the document." The document referred to is the Draft Nevada Contiguous Lands Wilderness EIS.

Humboldt County agreed with the proposed action (no wilderness).